DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 341 087 CS 507 689

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TITLE Reaching Out: A Break from Traditional Forensic Events. "On Interpretation Analysis."
PUB DATE 2 Nov 91
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (77th, Atlanta, GA, October 31-November 3, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audience Awareness; *Debate; *Debate Format; Higher Education; *Literature Appreciation; *Persuasive Discourse; *Public Speaking; *Rhetorical Criticism
IDENTIFIERS Debate Tournaments; *Interpretation Analysis (Debate)

ABSTRACT

In recent years a new event called "Interpretation Analysis" has appeared at certain forensic events. The objective is for the student, through analysis and performance, to study a piece of literature and to communicate his or her understanding of that literature to a specific audience. Perhaps there is room within the established forensic events to allow interpretation analysis to play a more important role. An examination of the use of introductions in forensics suggests that the introduction can play informational, rhetorical, and aesthetical roles. Educators should make sure these characteristics are satisfied by participants by requiring detailed analysis. Furthermore, planners should assure that event criteria vary from year to year; otherwise, participants will not grow as students of literature. Detailed analysis of a text will lead to creative methods for the performer, forcing him or her not to rely on a "programmed performance style" for all performances. Even if not through a new event called interpretation analysis, educators should make sure that students analyze the literature and apply that analysis to introductions and performances. (SG)

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REACHING OUT: A BREAK FROM TRADITIONAL FORENSIC EVENTS

"On Interpretation Analysis"

Ronald J. Seney

Presented at the SCA Convention
November 2, 1991
Atlanta, Georgia

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REACHING OUT: A BREAK FROM
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In the field of Performance of Literature, we can "reach out" to new interpretative events but maybe more importantly we can also "reach out" to fulfill the educational value of "literary analysis" within the traditional forensic events. Let us look at the establishment of a "new" event or one that has, in the last of couple of years, begun to be used in certain tournaments. Then let us re-evaluate the present events according to contemporary theories of Performance Studies to see where we can certainly "reach out" and possibly demand an analysis of the Literature that will be and must be communicated to a specific audience.

At several tournaments in the last few years, such as Ball State and Eastern Ill. State, an event called "Interpretation Analysis has appeared. The description for this event is as follows: "(4 min.max interp., 4 min.max public address, 2 min.max impromptu Q&A) Students will present an interpretation selection from any of the three major genres. After the selection, students will provide an original speech analyzing the interpretative choices in the selection. This analysis may be made in terms of historical background, technique, pedagogical value, or

any other means used to bring life to the selection. A session will follow in which the judges may bring the ballot to life through a question and answer exchange with the contestant. Remaining Q&A (if any) will be opened to audience members." (Ball State Invitation Event Rules).

The objectives of this event, I believe, are the objectives of contemporary and traditional Performances theories that are being taught at major colleges and Universities in Performance Studies, such as:

"1. To study the world's best literature
2. To expand one's knowledge of him/herself
3. To gain performance techniques that will communicate the literature to an audience
4. To be able to evaluate one's own performance constructively as well as the performance of others."

(Roles in Interpretation, Yordon)

"1. Through performance we can accomplish a synthesizing process. At a given moment, performance forces us to evoke all of our experience with a text--our research into the meanings and significance of its words, our intellectual and emotional understanding of the speaker and the action in the text, and our physical vocal experience of the sounds."

(Performing Literature, Long and HopKins)

We can find similar objectives from Wallace Bacon, Bowen,

Aggertt, and Rickett, and Lee and Gura. In summary, the objective is for the student through analysis and performance studies a piece of literature and communicates his/her understanding of that literature to a specific audience. Thereby this forces the student to not rely on a "programmed performance style" that could be used for all performances. (More on this later)

The problem I have with this event, Interpretation Analysis, as stated earlier is in the format of the event rather than the intention of the event.

1. 4,4,2 format could cause a problem for the judge with constant timing and not allow complete attention to the performance.

2. Q&A session--Question? Within 8 minutes will the judge be able to ask pertinent questions on analysis and performance or will he/she choose not to ask questions or ask something to be asking? This could lead to waste of 2 minutes.

In my performance classes, we spend 15 to 20 minutes discussing and questioning analysis and performance choices on 3 or 4 performances. It takes time to think about the performance before valuable questions arise.

3. What will this do about the time schedule? Will it take longer than the 10 minutes allowed. In talking with Rob Nading at Eastern ILL. State, he said that the schedule was kept on time. But!! We all know people who shall we say enjoy hearing themselves talk. We may get those people for judges, is 2

minutes to ask a question and then have a response workable? Plus with the alternative to allow audience members to ask questions--the judge will have to have complete control over the session. I see problems arise.

Taking the same event--same objectives--but changing the format a little we could have: "Speakers will present an interpretation selection from manuscript representing any of the three genres and an analysis of that literature off manuscript. The emphasis should be on the performance of the literature such as 60% performance-40% analysis. The format may include analysis/performance, performance/analysis, or the analysis may be interspersed throughout the performance. The analysis may focus on historical background, performance technique, pedagogical value or any other means used to bring life to the literature. 10 minute maximum."

1. This solves the timing situation/problem.

2. This alleviates the Q&A session whether or not it was a potential problem. (I feel it was)

3. This provides a more creative approach for the performer on how to present the analysis.

This approach has been used in the classroom i.e. Dr. HopKins, Dr. Merritt, myself and I'm sure several others. It is also being voted on as an experimental event for the MN. State Tournament for 1992.

Both of these are educationally sound events--I believe one has less potential problems and is more creative for the performer.

Now we all know that creating a new event is difficult--but maybe we can "reach out" within our established events and let interpretation analysis play a more important role. Specifically let us look at:

1. Introductions
2. Creating different criteria for an event
3. P.O.I.
4. Programmed Performance Style

Typically what do we hear as an introduction? First a teaser, during which we do not know who is talking, to whom they are talking, or why they are talking. Supposedly the teaser is to grab our attention and possibly set the mood. But how many times is it done because the "winners" always use a teaser? Then we have a few lines that give us a general theme and the title and author.

What should we hear? In all types of public communication, there are some common goals for introductions. Usually we start with an attention getter that leads us into the topic to be discussed and a preview of the points or content of the presentation. While doing this the speaker is gaining rapport with the audience and setting the mood for what will follow.

By looking at performance of literature text books, we find that the authors recommend almost the same type of introduction

for literature performances. Yordon in Roles in Performance gives us four purposes for an introduction.

"1. It prepares the audience for the specific selection to be performed.

2. It prepares the performer for their audience.

3. It lets the audience see the performer as him/herself before changing to become the persona in the text.

4. It communicates the performer's enthusiasm for the selection."

She also states an introduction should include most or all of the following:

"1. Title of selection

2. Author's name

3. An attention-getting opening with a minimum of filler information that could be said before any performance like 'The piece I am going to read for you today'

4. A delivery that sets an appropriate mood for the selection

5. Direct audience contact during delivery

6. A natural delivery where the performer remains him/herself

7. A content that has your expected audience in mind

8. A suggestion of what the performer's interpretation of the text is to be

9. Biographical or critical information about the author or the selection which is interesting or important for the

audience to know

10. Background information about what has happened before the scene begins if the performer is not reading the entire work or if the performer is not reading the opening scene(this is particularly relevant for the performance of prose fiction or drama)" (Roles in Performance, Yordon)

Other authors of texts say "the introduction should reveal your relationship with the material you read, but it may also deal with the author and his creation of the selection....What needs to be said about the author, the literary form, any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities, or other significant matters to help your audience understand it?" (Communicative Reading, Aggertt and Bowen)

"The introduction should look ahead to the reading and should set a tone that will prepare for it" (The Art of Interpretation, Bacon)

"An introduction sets up the literary text." (Performing Literature, An Introduction to Oral Interpretation, Long and HopKins)

From these and many others, one can conclude that an introduction plays several roles--informational, rhetorical, and aesthetical.

Do the introductions used by our students fulfill all these roles? I don't believe they do but by "reaching out" and requiring detailed analysis and making sure that analysis is used in the introductions we are providing educational value for the

student.

The introduction is the audience's program. It provides pertinent information that will them enjoy and understand the performance. I sometimes wonder after some introductions if the performer really wants me to understand what they are doing?

Going on the second point, setting up different criteria for events. By this I mean, for one year Prose selections must be third person narrators or selections must have been written in the 19th century. This provides an educational value in looking at literature other than 1st person narratives written by modern writers. There is nothing wrong with 1st person narratives but a student who competes for four years and does basically the same material is not growing as a student of literature. Are we not suppose to expand the knowledge of the student? Isn't that what education is about? Aren't competitive events suppose to be educational?

The third area I mentioned was P.O.I. How many times have you heard a POI and unless you were told which was the prose or poetry, or drama (all being in 1st person) you didn't know. An analysis of poetry <u>demands</u> that the structure of the poem be heard--that the sound values be heard--and that the sense of the poem be heard. There is a distinction between poetry and prose, yes even free verse--notice it is called verse. That distinction must be heard in performance and communicated to the audience. That comes about through analysis.

The fourth area, Programmed performance style. Remember

judging contestant A at the last tournament in Prose, Poetry, D.I. and POI. What did you see? Maybe

1. The same fondling of the script--running the finger along the edge of the paper.

2. The same flipping of the page for a scene or time change. My question here is always--How limited is the performer or the coach that the only way to show a change or scene or time is a mechanical flip of the page. Analysis of what is happening at that moment will lead to more creative methods for the performer.

3. The same vocal inflections for every character.

4. The same physical gestures for every character. The biting of the lip. The raising of the eyebrow. The look away when something is hard to say or too emotional.

5. The same persona for every piece of literature. I marvel that three different authors could create the same persona.

My point--Analysis will say that this cannot happen. Analysis will show that all these personas are different--maybe similar--but different.

Let us "reach out" in interpretation analysis. If not with a new event called "Interpretation Analysis," at least let us add to the educational value of our program by being sure our students analyze the literature and implement that analysis into their introductions and into their performances.